

HANDSOME HARRY

STORIES OF LAND AND SEA.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office by Frank Tousey

No. 7.

NEW YORK, MARCH 10, 1899.

Price 5 Cents.

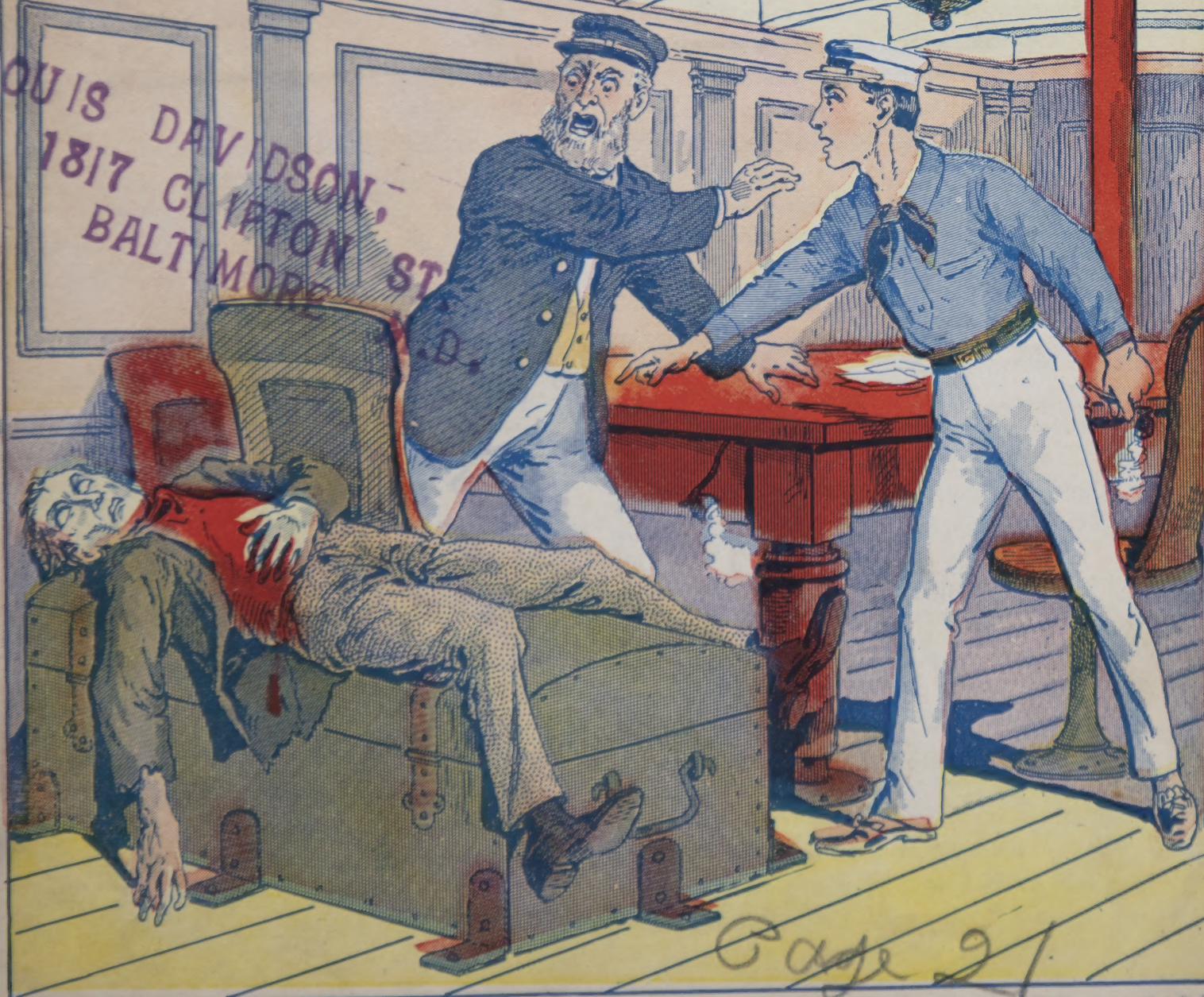
HANDSOME HARRY IN RUSSIA

OR

OUT IN THE WASTES.

BY AUTHOR OF "HANDSOME HARRY."

LOUIS DAVIDSON,
1817 CLIFTON ST.
BALTIMORE, MD.



Page 21

"What's the matter with you?" asked the captain. "Look there!" Ira cried.
The captain turned and sprang up from his seat with a most fearful yell.

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CHAPTER 7

ST. PETERSBURG—THE SECRET SOCIETY.

It is not our purpose to bore our readers with a long description of the capital of Russia.

The stay of our hero was short there, and a few words upon such places and people as he came in contact with will suffice.

Generally speaking, St. Petersburg is a city of handsome proportions, worthy to take rank with other European capitals.

The greatest drawback is the climate, which never gives them more than ninety fair days in the year.

There is little or no spring, not much summer, a gloomy autumn; and a fine winter.

The cold is intense, but without change, and is therefore more bearable than more erratic climates.

The Belvedere arrived in the beginning of the winter.

Harry was not unprepared for this, and had brought with him plenty of warm clothing and furs, which quite changed the character of the Belvederes.

Ching-Ching and Samson were obliged to array themselves as well as the rest as far as their lower limbs were concerned, but they kept their heads bare.

The Belvedere was drawn up by a quay, and the next morning Harry went ashore to see the Mason—one Nevski—to whom he had a letter of introduction.

His house stood in what they called the

First Admiralty Quartal—a noble structure, composed almost entirely of granite.

The windows were all double, and in every room and passage great fires were roaring.

Comfort and luxury abounded on every side.

Harry was ushered into an apartment on the ground floor, where he found a young man, handsome, but rather dissipated, engaged in reading.

He just glanced at Harry and went on with his book.

"Same as England," thought Harry; "we are not introduced, and therefore cannot speak."

An old man of majestic appearance now entered.

This was the Mason, Nevski, and he advanced with a cordial smile.

"So glad to have the pleasure of seeing you," he said, in perfect English. "My friend Anderson has written concerning you. Don't go, Soltki. Mr. Harry, this is my son."

"Mr. Harry" was the name our hero had assumed.

The young Russian bowed and resumed his seat and his reading.

"Pray be seated," said the elder Russian. "Will you smoke a cigarette?"

"Thank you, no; it is too early," said Harry, disposing himself in an easy-chair. "You know the object of my visit?"

"I have an inkling of it. You seek one Captain Brocken."

"Is that the name he has given here?"

"Yes."

"He is bold," said Harry, "seeing how well it is known."

"The name is nothing," said the Russian. "A Captain Brown in England might be a murderer, but it does not follow that every Captain Brown who comes here is to be suspected."

The young Russian, Soltki, looked up for a moment at his father with an amused smile.

"You trust everybody," he said.

"Until I find him out, my son."

"And what then?"

"I mete out to him the reward of a traitor," replied the old man sternly. "Were he the dearest friend on earth, I would not stand between him and his punishment."

Soltki yawned and turned over a page.

The subject did not seem to interest him much.

"Have you seen this Brocken?" asked Harry.

"Yes," replied Nevski; "he came here and joined our lodge. He brought good papers with him and we trusted him. The result is what we might have expected."

"He has betrayed you?"

"Yes."

"To whom?"

"To the emperor," replied Nevski, "who hates our order. This is a despotic country. It is ruled by an emperor, not a king, and he likes to have all things under his thumb. Masonry brooks not tyranny, and he hates it."

"I wonder he allows it to exist," said Harry.

"How can he help himself?" said Nevski, "seeing that he knows nothing of its power—at least, nothing until this Brocken came. He has no means of telling who was a Mason and who was not, and, for aught he knows, every man around him might be a member of the craft."

"How do you know that you are betrayed?"

"Three of our principals were yesterday ordered off to Siberia," replied the old man, with a gloomy face, "and Brocken was seen

an hour before to leave the palace by the secret gate."

"That evidence is enough."

"Enough for us, and a lodge is summoned for to-night, ostensibly for usual business. He will come as usual, and will be charged with his crime."

"Suppose he denies it?"

"We shall have proof ready. We have friends around the emperor who can bring us what we want."

"If guilty, what will be his fate?"

"He dies," said Nevski firmly. "Lots will be drawn for his executioner."

"Leave him to me," asked Harry eagerly. "I ask no more than a fair hand-to-hand fight with him."

"But perhaps he will not fight."

"If I fall, let him go free."

"You are a gallant fellow," said Nevski, holding out his hand. "It shall be so. Soltki, hearest thou this?"

"I have heard," said Soltki, with something like contempt in his tone, "and scarce understand why a man should risk his life for such a dog."

"The chivalry of our family," returned his father, bending his brows, "seems to have died in you."

"I am not romantic," said Soltki. "If I have an enemy, it is enough for me that he dies. I have no desire to be his butcher."

"Fair fighting is not butchery," said Harry, with an angry glow upon his face.

Soltki laughed.

"Let us not quarrel," he said. "You have your opinions and I have mine. Let us keep them to ourselves and enjoy them as we can."

He turned round a little and said no more.

Harry resumed his conversation with the elder man.

"Is the brotherhood large here?" he said.

"More than half of the best men are in it," said Nevski. "We could hold Russia in a chain if our purpose was political."

"It is so, in the main."

"Yes, but our politics are beyond the common dealings of the world."

"The meeting, you say, is here?"

"Yes, at eight. Do not knock; the door-keeper will know your footsteps!"

"Know my footsteps!"

"Yes; he has heard it once, and will not forget it. Will you stay to dinner?"

"No, thank you," returned Harry. "I must go on board to prepare my friends for the work to-night."

"Your officers?"

"Yes. Tom True and Ira Staines—they are Masons, too. I shall bring them with me, with your permission."

"It is given. Do not forget—at eight."

Harry rose, and Soltki, rising too, bowed. The parting between the two young men was cold. Nevski went out with our hero.

As they entered the hall a huge bloodhound came from a side room and looked at Harry.

"A friend, Dragon," said Nevski, and the bloodhound immediately gave Harry a paw to shake.

"This is my doorkeeper," said the Russian; "he will know you a year hence. To-night he will be at the door. As a friend approaches he gives a short, sharp bark. If an enemy comes, he is silent until that enemy has crossed the threshold, then he only waits the word to bring him down. A good dog is Dragon."

"A wonderful dog," said Harry.

"For the present then, adieu," said the Russian. "Wrap your furs around you, for the air is cold."

"I do not feel it much," replied Harry.

"Perhaps not," rejoined the other, "but it is powerful nevertheless. It comes upon you silently but swiftly, and a finger or two, or more, a feature or limb, may be lost ere you dream of injury. Good-by, and remember to-night at eight."

CHAPTER II. 72

THE TRAITOR.

The snow was falling lightly and easily, undisturbed by a breath of wind, as Harry, Tom and Ira wended their way to the house of Nevski, the Russian. The profound darkness of the sky was but little broken by the light of the lamps, and the stillness was impressive. Not a soul was about as they

crossed the quay, and the tall houses with great patches upon their faces looked like the spectral mansions of a city of the dead.

"St. Petersburg is not lively at night," said Ira in a low voice; "the very houses seem to be deserted."

"They bar their windows close and keep thick curtains, too," said Harry; "and this is a fasting day, I believe."

"It might be a dying day for all," said Tom, pausing to look around; "river, streets, ships, houses, all cold and still."

"Stand back there!" cried Ira.

Tom leaped back a pace, and a sledge, driven by one man, closely muffled up, came swinging round the corner of a street. The man sat still, the snow deadened the sound of the horses' feet; it glided up and passed away as silently as a shadow.

"That fellow ought to have bells," said Ira.

"It is odd that he has not," remarked Harry. "He breaks the law."

"What law can there be here?" said Tom. "We are in ghost-land."

"It seems like it," said Ira.

It was not only ghost-like, but very cold, so they hurried on to the appointed spot.

As they ascended the steps of the house, which was shielded from the snow by a portico, Dragon within gave a short, sharp bark, which had more of greeting than threatening in it.

Harry opened the door and walked in.

Dragon came at once and rubbed his nose against our hero's hand. Then he glanced at Ira and Tom.

"Friends," said Harry, as the dog walked away. "But the hall seems to be deserted; which is our way, I wonder?"

A door at the far end of the hall opened, but nobody appeared.

The hint, however, was sufficient, and they passed in, to find themselves in a magnificent saloon, with huge fires blazing at either end.

"Comfortable," said Tom, taking a seat.

But he was not allowed to rest long.

A gong sounded, and another door opening, Nevski, the Russian, appeared, robed as a grand master.

"You are punctual," he said, shaking hands. "How was the night?"

"Rough," replied Harry.

"Anybody about?"

"No," said our hero, "except one man, in a sledge, which, strange to say, carried no bells."

"No bells," repeated Nevski; "that is unusual."

"It was my belief from the first that it was a ghost," said Tom, "and I stick to it."

"More likely to be an agent of the police," said the Russian, with a smile. "Which way went he?"

"Northward of the quay," said Harry.

"Then he is not in search of us," returned Nevski, "and we will trouble no more about him. The lodge will shortly open; follow me."

He led them to an inner saloon where all was made ready and about thirty men assembled. Most of them were of tall and commanding appearance and wore badges, which showed that they were high in life.

The meeting was no common one.

Soltki was there, sitting in a corner, with a book, as before, but he was not reading, and his eyes shifted restlessly to and fro.

He gave our friends no greeting, and Harry in return treated him with indifference.

"Whom do we wait for, brother?" asked one of the Masons.

"For Potemka and—the traitor," said Nevski.

"Do they come together?"

"Yes. Potemka lives in the same house, and he has agreed to call for him."

"They are unpunctual."

"Traitors are often laggards."

A silence ensued, the Masons standing or sitting quietly.

The tick of the clock and the rustle of the falling ashes of the fires could plainly be heard.

Soltki put his book aside and sat with his head bent down.

"A quarter past," said Nevski, breaking the silence. "Brocken delays longer than usual."

"Perhaps he has heard that we have discovered his villainy," said the Mason who had spoken before.

"Impossible," replied Nevski; "it is known to none but those here assembled."

"But Potemka—is he true?"

"Brocken's villainy has sent his brother to Siberia. He is not likely to fail us at this time."

"It is enough, brother. I am content."

All this was very trying to the three visitors, Harry, Tom and Ira, who felt their nerves strung up to the highest point of excitement. Harry especially was eager and impatient under the weight of the crawling moments. Surely his hour for revenge had come at last.

He felt that another disappointment would break him down.

But so it is with all of us. We say that if this and that and so and so were to come, we should be unable to bear it, but the misfortune and suffering, as the case may be, falls on us, and yet we live and learn—Heaven only knows how—to bear it.

Harry had thought before that he could bear no more, and yet he was still in the full glow of health and strength.

Half-past.

The Masons moved, and several exchanged remarks in whispers.

Nevski began to walk up and down, and a faint smile dawned upon the face of Soltki.

"I fear," said Nevski, "that Potemka has played us false."

The faces of the listeners darkened, and one cried that the brotherhood was lost.

"Never," cried Nevski; "if all were traitors but two men, the brotherhood would remain. It is based on a principle which cannot perish. Hark! I hear Dragon—louder than usual. Brethren, be ready."

The sword of every man leaped from its sheath, and, ready to fight to the death, they stood facing the door.

It opened, and a man with a pallid face staggered in, followed by the hound.

"Potemka!" cried a dozen voices.

"The same," he replied.

"But Dragon," cried Nevski; "what do you here, my dog?"

"He scents blood," said Potemka. "Behold!"

He threw aside his cloak, and pulling open his vest, revealed a ghastly wound in his breast, still gaping.

The dog's eyes flashed and he prepared to spring, but his master seized him by the

collar and dragged him from the room and closed the door.

CHAPTER III. 73

THE REAL TRAITOR.

The interest manifest in Potemka was now intense.

Harry was one of the foremost to offer him aid, and even Soltki arose from his seat and drew near, but the wounded man refused all help.

"Not yet," he said; "I have something to tell which concerns you all. When it is known think of me."

"Go on, brother," said Nevski.

"Brethren," continued Potemka, and his voice rang through the room like the blast of a trumpet, "we are doubly betrayed."

An angry roar answered him, but Nevski held up his hand and bade them be silent.

"This Brocken," pursued Potemka, "was a traitor first—that you all know—and he was summoned hither. I undertook to bring him here to-night, but I have failed."

He paused and put a hand upon his side, and the deadly pallor upon his face increased, but he waved off all help and continued:

"I made the appointment with him at half-past seven, and at that time went down to his apartment. I found him packing up a valise. 'How, now, brother,' said I, 'what is this?' 'I am called away in haste,' he answered. 'Brother,' said I, laying a hand upon his shoulder, 'thou canst not go—thou must come to the lodge to-night.' He answered me with—this," and Potemka pointed to his wound.

"Twas simply done," he said, "for this Brocken is no novice with his weapons. I staggered back and put my hand upon my sword. He struck me with his clenched hand—and darkness came upon me."

The air of the speaker was dramatic and impressive, but perfectly natural. He had a fiery spirit within him, more like that oft found in sunny Spain than the cold nature of the men of the north.

"He might have slain me then outright," he continued, "but he spared, and so far I

owe him my life. When I awoke I was lying in his room, just where I had fallen; the lamp and fire were burning, but he was gone. I rang the bell and the concierge answered. From him I learned——"

He paused again and his eyes roamed over the room as if in search of somebody; a smile spread over his face as he proceeded:

"A stranger called an hour before to see him, a muffled stranger, who dared not show his face. The interview was brief and the stranger departed; as he crossed the threshold the muffler about his face slipped aside and revealed his face. It was only for a moment, but the concierge knew him."

A murmur ran round the room. Potemka stepped back a pace as if to bar the exit of the traitor.

"The concierge," he cried, "is a brother, and he knows us all."

"Who is the man?" shouted the Masons.

"Soltki!" cried Potemka, and springing forward he seized the traitor, who was making toward the door, by the throat.

Nevski, the father, fell back with a bitter cry—the voices of the rest were hushed—and Soltki tried to put a bold front upon it.

"Hands off!" he cried. "You lie!"

"Stand there," said Potemka, pushing him aside. "Now, face us all, and deny it with the oath of our craft."

The traitor stood with his eyes cast down, his cheeks white and moist, his lips hard and dry.

"Swear," said the Masons.

"I—I——" gasped Soltki—"let Potemka prove his words."

"What need?" said his father, coming forward; "my son, deny not your guilt."

The calm of the old man was far more terrible and impressive than any expression of grief could have been. With a majestic air he marched to the head of the table and sat down in the chair of his office.

"Let the lots be cast," he said.

"Am I to be condemned unheard?" asked Soltki.

"Include all but the strangers," continued Nevski, not heeding him. "We are not murderers nor executioners, but all must fight for the cause."

"Stay," said Harry, "let us not be exempt—we are Masons, too."

"As you will," replied Nevski. "Bring forth the box and write every name. I am not the father now—I am a Mason."

The names of all in the room were written upon strips of paper, folded, and cast into a box. Then Nevski thrust in his hand and drew one forth.

"Read, brother," he said to a Mason near him.

"Ortaski," cried the man.

Ortaski, a man about thirty, with a light blonde beard and blue eyes, stood forth.

The Masons arose, pushed the table aside, and formed a circle, with Ortaski and Soltki in the center. One Mason brought forward two small swords and gave the traitor his choice.

He looked determined now, and chose his weapon with an air of calmness, but keen eyes could see that there was fear beneath the surface.

"They have had this sort of play before," whispered Tom to Ira.

Ira nodded and said, "I reckon so." Harry looked on with interest.

"Ortaski," said Soltki, advancing, "there is an old grudge between us, which can be settled now. Your woman's face won Lelia from me."

"You sought to play her false," replied Ortaski. "I have wedded her."

"She will be a widow to-night," said Soltki grimly.

"As Heaven wills," replied the other. "I am ready."

Their weapons crossed, and the merest tyro in the act of fencing could have seen which was the better man.

Soltki was skilled in the use of the weapon; Ortaski handled it like a novice.

"Doomed," muttered Harry, and he felt a tinge of pity for his wife.

Soltki played with his antagonist for a minute or so, as a cat does with a mouse, then he struck him. The keen weapon passed through Ortaski's breast, he fell forward upon his face, and his wife was a widow.

"Remove our brother," cried Nevski, "and give the victor wine and ten minutes' rest."

"I need neither wine nor rest," returned Soltki, tauntingly; "draw for the next man who is tired of the world."

"Rest," said Nevski; "thou hast a heavy task before thee."

The ten minutes passed in silence, Soltki occupying it in feeling the point of his weapon. Then the second lot was drawn.

"Read," cried the chief.

"Nevski," read the Mason.

A thrill ran through the assembly. Fate had brought father and son together in the arena of death.

Nevski rose calmly.

"I am the Mason now," he said. "Traitor, stand forth!"

"Thou wert never a father to me," replied Soltki with a frown, "and this world and myself will be well rid of you."

The old man answered not a word, but an angry murmur ran round the bystanders.

"I'll silence that in some of you," said Soltki. "Now, sire, I am ready."

Their weapons met, and in spite of the difference in their ages, they were well matched. Nevski had been a great swordsman in his time, and his son owed his skill mainly to his teaching.

The contest was keen, for both were in earnest—the one stirred by unnatural hatred and the other inclined by a sense of duty. The slender weapons wound about in thrust and parry until their arms ached, and nothing had been done.

"A rest," cried Soltki, and they both paused. Wine was offered them, but Soltki alone touched it. He drank deeply.

Once more they stood unfalteringly. Soltki, by a quick movement, pierced his father's arm and the blood flowed freely.

"A welcome sight," he said.

The words were yet upon his lips when his father lunged forward and pierced his heart with his sword. The traitor gave out a quick gasp, then fell upon the floor—a corpse.

"'Tis done," cried the old man. "Justice has been dealt to the traitor."

He paused and tossed his arms aloft. His craft, the duty he owed to it, and all else vanished—he was the father again.

"My son, my son," he moaned.

They moved aside for him, and he fell beside the dead youth.

His tremulous hands passed tenderly over the stiffening face, and with one great cry—

wild, despairing, heart-rending—his head sank down.

A brief pause followed, and then his brethren advanced.

They raised him tenderly—but he was dead.

Awe-stricken, the spectators looked at each other. Such scenes fall but to the lot of few to witness, and one and all felt that the veil which hides the deeper emotions of the heart had been rent in their presence.

Outside Dragon uttered a mournful howl.

"Brethren," said one of the Masons, "the discovery of our presence here would be followed by death or exile. It would not serve the dead. Each man to his home, and all keep the secret within his heart. For you, gentlemen," he added, turning to our hero and his friends, "it will be best to leave the country at once."

"I cannot go," said Harry, "until I have traced this Captain Brocken."

"That must be your own affair," said the Mason; "at least you must hasten from here; we rely upon you. Keep our secret and your own. Gentlemen, disperse."

They opened the door, and Dragon bounded in and went straight to his dead master. He gave one sniff, and scenting death, raised his head and howled again.

"That dog must be killed!" cried one of the Masons, drawing his sword. "He will bring the police upon us."

"Not so," said Harry, stepping between. "I cannot permit anything so faithful to be killed in cold blood. Dragon, come here."

The dog, with head bowed, came over and crouched at his feet.

"Your master is dead," said Harry; "you must come with me, Dragon."

The dog looked piteously at the dead men, then glanced at Harry, as if he did not quite understand his word.

"Dead," said our hero again. "Come, Dragon, he will not miss you now."

Dragon went back and licked the face and hands of the old man tenderly. This was his last farewell to a master he had loved and served well, and rising, he followed Harry out. The others followed, one of the Masons closing the door behind them.

Outside they found the streets as empty and silent as before, and the rain fast fall-

ing. No man uttered a word, but drawing their fur mantles around them hurried to their homes, and our three friends bent their steps toward the Belvedere.

CHAPTER IV.

CHING-CHING AND SAMSON GO TO A FAIR.

Winter is the great and gay time of St. Petersburg. It is the season the Russian loves best, with its sledging parties and assemblies, when the weather is clear and frosty, and on the morrow the Belvideres found the capital alive.

The snow had ceased, the sky was clear, and the Neva was strong enough to bear anything. Hundreds of skaters were flying over the surface of the river, and sledges innumerable, with their musical bells, were traversing the streets. Crowds of people were moving to and fro.

The open quay soon showed signs of more than ordinary activity, and men brought up swings and ups-and-downs, roundabouts, and other things belonging to outdoor entertainments peculiar to the people. It was plain that there was going to be a fair.

"Sammy," said Ching-Ching, "when dere am sport 'bout it bery wrong for you an' me to be away."

"Dat true, Chingy."

"So we berrer go."

"Ax Massa Harry first."

Harry was not visible, for he was busy in the cabin. Tom, however, gave them leave.

"We are not likely to get away from here just yet," he said, looking at the frozen river, "unless there is an earthquake. But don't you fellows get into mischief."

"Now, Massa Tom," said Ching-Ching, "am dat at all likely?"

"About the most likely thing that I know of," replied Tom. "Be off!"

They went below and asked Witta if he would join them, but that child of Africa had quite enough of the cold inside the ship without going out for it.

He was sitting almost on top of a stove, and a little savagely declined to go.

"Bery well," said Ching-Ching, "but keep your neck-feathers down, ole man. Dis am de school ob perliteness."

They left him shivering and joined the throng on the quay.

It was very cold at first, but a little brisk moving about put their blood in circulation and they were soon comfortable.

"Hab a swing, Sammy?" said Ching-Ching.

"All right, Chingy."

Ching-Ching went up to the owner of the swing and asked him how much he charged.

The man answered in Russian.

He did not understand him.

"Neber mind," said Ching-Ching, getting in, "we will pay you to-morrow."

The man understood the action, if not the words, and commenced in a frightful gibberish to give vent to his objections.

Ching-Ching put the swing in motion.

The man held on behind and bellowed like a bull, but Ching-Ching seemed to have the knack of keeping the thing going, and higher and higher rose the swing.

The owner dropped off, and having indulged himself with a shake of his muffled fist, ran away for the police.

He came back with a very fierce-looking official, and Ching-Ching bowed to his authority and stopped the swing.

This man spoke English.

"You must come out of the swing," he said.

"Bery good, my lord," replied Ching-Ching, politely, "I get out dis minute."

Which he did.

"Why did you get in without paying?" asked the officer, a little mollified.

"Because dat bery handsome genlyman," said Ching-Ching, pointing to the owner, who was more like a griffin than a man, "say dat de charge noting."

This reply was translated, and as much of the countenance of the swing proprietor as was visible turned purple with fury.

He sought out words in his vocabulary to express his indignation, but failing, sat down in the snow, and gasped like a cod-fish in the net of the toiler by the sea.

The official rubbed his back, and Ching-Ching, with a praiseworthy generosity, fanned him until he was able to speak.

Then he staggered to his feet, and gave vent to an address in Russian, which, being translated, had the following bearing:

"I never—never said nothing about nothing. I told him the regular charge, and he grinned at me like a she-cat with kittens—and when I tried to stop him, he nearly knocked out my brains with tle swing."

And then he finished up with a perfect bouquet of flowery language.

Ching-Ching, on hearing the meaning of the address, felt in his trousers pocket, the bottom of which was somewhere near the calf of his leg, and bringing forth a very small copper coin with a hole in it paid it over under protest.

"If me know dat he charge," he said, "me nebber fool away my money on a swing like dat. In my country, which my birlplace was Pekin, and my farder de chief mandarin, all de swings free, and in some places dey pay de men dat ride. Sammy know dat place well, and he ready to s'port me in what I say."

"Who's Sammy?" asked the official.

"Dis young genlyman wif—a not quite white countenance," replied Ching-Ching, pointing to our sable friend, who was grinning like two people. "His farder a bery great man, too. Sammy, tell dis lubly genlyman in de uniform all 'bout your farder."

"You tell it berrer," replied Samson modestly shrinking from the narrative and having a shrewd suspicion that if there was anything to tell Ching-Ching would tell it best.

"On second thoughts," said Ching-Ching, "I reserve dat story. It much too good to throw away on one man. I mean to bring out dat story in penny numbers. Come along, Sammy."

The disappointed official twirled his mustaches and looked after the retreating forms of our friends.

He scarcely knew what to make of them, and held a short conference with the proprietor of the swing.

"Rum fellows," he said in Russian.

"No good," said the other. "Who are they?"

"I think they belong to the English craft lying in the river."

"And that's no good either," rejoined the

other. "I think you ought to keep your eye upon them."

"I think so too," replied the official, and twirled his mustaches in an ominous manner.

It was not long before his services were required, for our friends soon got into trouble again—this time with a man who resembled the pieman of England in many respects.

He sold a rough sort of pastry, or gambled, just as his customers wished.

His gambling apparatus was very simple, consisting of a table, marked out in divisions, with figures from 0 up to 10, the 0 being the largest division, and the numbered spaces gradually decreasing until 10 was reached, and then the space was very small indeed.

Above, on a pivot, was a piece of iron, which the proprietor spun, and at whatever number the iron stopped, those who staked money on that number took pies accordingly.

Ching-Ching put a coin upon the ten, and the iron stopped at that number in a most unexpected and abrupt manner.

The pie-dealer called out that Ching-Ching had stopped it with the point of his umbrella, which, of course, our veracious friend denied, and, as he had done on other occasions, called Samson to witness.

Samson could only say that he had not seen him do it, and, as nobody supported the proprietor, not a person around having detected the nefarious act, if, indeed, it had been committed, the dispute was in full force when the official put in his appearance.

Ching-Ching recognized him in a moment, and read the dark frown upon his countenance, and forthwith proceeded to oil him beautifully.

"Oh, sir," he said, "me berry glad you come. I get justice done to me at last."

"Perhaps you will," said the official. "What's the matter?"

"Dis genlyman wif de pies," said Ching-Ching. "lose ten to me, and he not like to pay 'em. I tell him dat I speak to you, and he say dat he not listen to any ass in a blue coat and bright buttons. Den I say dat I nebber forgibe him for 'sultin' you, and stand up for my rights. Dat so, Sammy,

isn't it? Speak up for de weak and de 'pressed."

Now it so happened that the pie-dealer had expressed an indifference to official authority, if he had not put it quite so broadly as Ching-Ching had announced, and he felt the weakness of his position.

But he would not give in.

"He stopped the spinner with that umbrella," he said.

"What he say?" asked Ching-Ching.

The official told him.

"Now tink ob dat, Sammy," said Ching-Ching, addressing his friend; "to tink dat man eber come to dat. But nebber mind, I not take de pies. Yet he not going to rob de native ob him rights, for I gib dem pies," he added, with a sweet smile upon the public, "to all de lubly ladies and genlymen around me, and may dey all be 'live long and die happy."

Some of the crowd understood him, and as the pies were popular, began to clamor for their rights.

The pieman objected, and a most diabolical row ensued, which Ching-Ching and Samson took advantage of and walked away.

"Now, Chingy," asked Samson, "did you stop dat ting wif your umbrella?"

"De rumbrella was poking about de board at dat time," replied Ching-Ching, as if the action of that article had nothing to do with him, "but he much too good friend to me for me to accuse him ob dirty trick like dat."

"But, Chingy——"

"What dis?" interrupted Ching-Ching; "dancing-saloon? You dance, Sammy?"

"A lilly bit; me do de double shuffle and de Carolina breakdown."

"And me gib dem de Pekin fling; so come along, ole boy."

CHAPTER V.

UNDER A CLOUD.

While two of our friends are disporting themselves at the fair, we must make good use of our time, and relate an event of importance which happened on board the *Belvedere*.

Harry was so bitterly disappointed at the escape of his foe that he scarcely vouchsafed a word to those on board, but sat brooding in his cabin, and wondering how it was that the dark scoundrel who had wronged him so seemed to be so favored as to always have an inkling of his near approach and so escape him.

It is not our purpose to uphold revenge—the better spirit is a forgiving one. At the same time we do not intend to judge our hero harshly, as his lot was a peculiar one and he was tried as few men are—sorely, bitterly tried by the death of the brother whom he loved with the fierce intensity which lives only in those of twin existence.

He knew now that the figure in the sledge was Captain Brocken—but whither had he gone? That was the question, and such a question as could only be answered by the Russian police, whose knowledge of men and things in their land approach the marvelous.

He sent for one of them, and without revealing the story of his life, asked after Captain Brocken.

The man was reticent, and said it was difficult to say whither a single man had gone; men and sledges were common things in Russia, and they might easily follow a wrong scent.

With a smile which showed that he well understood what was wanted, Harry went to a strong chest, unlocked it, and brought out a small, neat-looking bag, which gave forth, as he placed it on the table, a pleasant, musical sound of jingling gold.

"Bring me news of the road he has taken," he said, "and that bag of gold is yours."

"Mine!" said the police agent, with his eyes glistening. "I must give half of it to the general fund."

"I will pay the usual charges," returned Harry; "that is for you."

"In two hours," said the man, "I will bring you what you want."

He hurried away, and barely had he gone when a knock at the door of the cabin was heard.

"Come in," cried Harry, and Cutten, with a most mysterious visage, came in, softly closing the door after him.

"Well?" said Harry.

"Cap'en," replied Cutten, "I've got some-

thing on my mind, and I want to get rid of it."

"Does it concern yourself?"

"No, cap'en."

"Who, then?"

"You, cap'en."

"Me!" exclaimed Harry, in surprise.

"Yes, cap'en," said old Cutten, "and it's 'bout that chap as you are trying to find."

Now Harry never talked over this with the men, or ever allowed it to be mentioned by them in his presence, and he frowned slightly as he asked Cutten what he meant.

"You've had him under your nose once," said Cutten, dropping his voice to a hoarse whisper, "right under your wery nose."

"When?"

"He was that black chap as pretended to cure you and didn't."

Harry expressed no doubt, as the whole truth flashed upon him in a moment. All the little things about the man which had appeared so familiar, yet so mysterious, to him, were there and then explained. But how was it that a man like Cutten knew anything about it?

"How know you that he was the man?" demanded Harry.

In breathless haste Cutten gave word for word the brief interview between Ira Staines and Captain Brocken, when the latter, by an involuntary exclamation, revealed himself.

Harry listened intently, and the shadows on his brow deepened.

"Why was not I told this before?" he asked, when Cutten concluded.

"I couldn't get at you at the time, sir," replied Cutten artfully, "and I thought I could do no good, but I couldn't keep it on my mind no longer."

"You expect no reward for this?"

"Oh, no, cap'en," replied Cutten, fervently, "for far be it from me to think of such a thing."

"That is well," said Harry, calmly, "for you will get none. Ask Mr. Staines to come to me, and keep your own counsel in this matter. If I hear of your chattering, you will part company with the Belvedere at once."

Cutten had certainly expected something more than this—in fact, he had pictured to

himself as being rewarded with a handful of gold, a shake of the hand, and some such words as these:

"I am glad to find that I have at least one true heart on board the *Belvedere*; I am proud of your devotion."

But matters were not so very agreeable.

Harry gave him no gold, no shake of the hand, and bade him speak a word on the subject at his peril.

Crestfallen and depressed, he sought out Ira Staines and told him he was wanted.

This done, he went below to Bill Grunt, in whom he had most unfortunately confided, and the pair had debated upon the seemingly certain profits of the communication.

"Well," said Bill, "you've seen him?"

Cutten groaned.

"What's the issoo?" perused Bill.

The sad issue was told, and Bill's face lengthened considerably.

"I dursn't tell him that I've trusted you," groaned Cutten; "you'll keep a stopper on your maw, won't you?"

"I'm sorry to say that I've told somebody."

"Who?" cried Cutten.

"Only Mr. True."

"Oh, Bill, you've done it! I'm as good as strung up to the yardarm," and the old man collapsed.

Meanwhile Ira Staines had presented himself before his captain, who, in calm, measured tones, bade him sit down.

Ira saw that something was up, but he had not the least notion of the truth.

"Staines," said our hero, "you came on board the *Belvedere* under very peculiar circumstances."

"There was nothing peculiar in it, seeing that my whole life has been peculiar," replied Ira, sadly.

"But there were certain peculiarities which I hoped you had left behind you," said Harry; "treachery, for instance."

"Treachery, captain!" said Ira, springing to his feet.

"Yes," said Harry, sternly. "Brocken was on board my ship, and you let him go."

"I see," said Ira, bowing his head; "I am betrayed."

"Say rather found out," replied our hero,

"You liked your old leader better than your new one. You may go."

"Go where, captain?"

"Where you will. Quit the *Belvedere*."

A gasping sob burst from the lips of Ira Staines, and he turned toward the door. Half way he halted, and faced about.

"I can't do it," he said; "my whole heart is here."

"Mere idle sentiment," replied Harry; "linger no longer."

"Hear me, captain," said Ira Staines, "and then do with me as you will. I did not know the man until he suddenly betrayed himself by his voice. I thought I knew the features, but their being stained deceived me as they deceived you. When I did know him, I could not betray him without giving him a run for his life, for he had—so I believe—done his best to save yours."

"The saving of my life," said Harry, "is but poor amends for the crimes he has committed. He has outraged every law, he is dyed with blood from head to heel, and by the law of every land his life is forfeited. If ever I catch him, he shall have the choice of two things: a duel to the death with me, or a trial at the drumhead."

"I thought you would have swung him at the yard-arm, captain."

"You did me a wrong. Have you anything more to say?"

"Only this, captain," said Ira Staines, "that I acted on the impulse of the moment, and bade him fly. I looked upon him as a rat, and I did not like to see him shot in the cage. I've a notion that the meanest vermin have a right to have a run for their lives, and I let him go. But if to-morrow I met him in the open field, I'd do my best to drag him back to you. That's my say, captain, with only this more, that I will not leave the *Belvedere*. If I am not fit to serve under you, I would rather die. Don't turn me adrift to become again what I once was, but mercifully put a rope around my neck and end me."

As he finished, he bowed his head, and two hot tears wrung from his heart dropped upon the deck. Harry stepped forward a pace or two, and laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Staines," he said, "I did but try you. You acted like a man, even as I would have acted

myself. Return to your duty—I am proud of you.”

Ira looked up, but the words he would have uttered stuck in his throat. He grasped our hero's extended hand, and went out silently.

“A true man,” murmured Harry, “and I think now that I owe my life to him—to Brocken. Why did he spare me? The mystery of this man thickens. I must know more of him ere I abandon the chase.”

An hour later the police agent returned to the Belvedere, bringing with him a roughly marked chart.

“This,” he said, “is the route he has taken, and he can take no other, unless he contemplates giving himself up to the wolves, or starvation.”

“Thank you,” said Harry; “here is your gold.”

“One word more, sir,” returned the agent, as he pocketed it; “do you go in pursuit?”

“I mean to endeavor to find him.”

“Same thing,” said the agent, coolly. “You need not hide anything now—or rather you cannot. I know all that concerns you.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes, and the meeting at Nevski's house. Bah! why should we have secrets? I am a brother.”

Harry uttered a joyful cry, and the agent laughed.

“You go in pursuit,” said the latter. “Well, you want means—that is, you want sledges—two, let us say. Give me another bag of gold, and in half an hour they shall be on the quay.”

“Tis done,” said Harry, as he produced the money.

“Go well armed, and well attended,” continued the agent, “for a stern chase is a long chase, and you will have to pass through a country where a thousand dead men might lie throughout the winter, and never be found, and long ere the summer comes again the wolves would grind your bones to powder. Ours is a great country, and we know very little of it out of the main roads.”

“I will go prepared,” said Harry.

“Take all your best men,” continued the agent, “and leave your ship to my charge. She cannot be taken away for many a month,

and you, if successful, will be back long before. If not, you will not want her.”

“But she is not mine. She is the property of Don Salvo, of Fortalago.”

“You have a brother's word that it shall be returned to him,” said the agent.

“It is enough,” said Harry, and they shook hands and parted.

Harry at once began his preparations, and chose six of his men, in addition to Ira, Tom Bill Grunt, and Cutten, who was a capital cook, and therefore an indispensable man. Then he asked for Samson and Ching-Ching, and was told that they were at the fair.

“Where they will be sure to get into mischief,” he said. “Tom, take a few men and go and look for them.”

Tom did so, and, as matters turned out, Harry had made a shrewd guess as to the state of affairs, as our readers shall presently see. When he was gone, Ira addressed himself to old Cutten:

“My friend,” he said, “I owe you something.”

Cutten colored and looked down. Ira took a sovereign from his purse, and put it into his hand.

“It is a custom of mine,” he said, “never to let virtue, even if it is involuntary, go unrewarded. The captain respected me once, he admires me now. Take your reward.”

Cutten looked up and pulled his forelock, as he saw Ira smiling at him.

“I'll never go on that tack again, sir,” he said. “Thanky very kindly, sir, for forgivin' me.”

“So summat has come out of it,” said Bill Grunt as Cutten finished telling his story to him. “Well, mate, we'll take the first opportunity of spending this suvrin, and enjoying ourselves.”

“So we will,” said Cutten.

But both of them left Samson and Ching-Ching out of their calculations.

CHAPTER VI. 76

THE DANCING-BOOTH.

Dancing may be said to be the universal amusement. All nations that have hitherto

been discovered, and of whom there is any record, desire to trip in various fashions the light fantastic toe, and Russia is no exception to the rule.

The booth patronized by Samson and Ching-Ching was almost full of people, and the heat given out by their assembled bodies was tremendous. The fact of there being little or no ventilation made matters worse. But as neither of ours suffered much from rarity in the atmosphere, they were perfectly contented, and made preparations to enjoy themselves.

We have already hinted, upon more than one occasion, that the English language is well known in Russia, even by some of the boors or serfs, and no one need be astonished to learn that the familiar tongue spoken by several of the people around them was heard near Samson and Ching-Ching.

"You will dance, Sammy?" said Ching-Ching.

"Rader, old boy, but what sort of dance hab dey de pleasure ob perpletrating here?"

"Nebber mind dat," said Ching-Ching; "first get your partner, den stand up, and den learn to dance. Here some berry lubly women; go in and win, Sammy."

Three very pretty faces drew forth this observation, and the owners of the same looked with some curiosity at the friends as they advanced to "solicit the honor," etc.

Sammy rather hung fire, for he was not what we call a ladies' man, but Ching-Ching was wont to charm the tender sex, and he plunged into business at once.

"De dance await your lubly presence," he said, addressing the nearest, a dark-eyed, roguish-looking girl, with a pretty fur cap tied about her ears.

"I am engaged," she replied in English.

"Oh, say not dat," moaned Ching-Ching, turning up his eyes, until there was nothing in view but the whites—"say not dat, you fairest ob de fair. Show me de man dat am engaged to."

"What for?" asked the girl.

"I fight him to de last garps," returned Ching-Ching, ferociously. "I dye de floor wif him gore; I scatter him remains all—all—about—anywhere. Say not dat you engage."

"Indeed, I am," said the girl, looking round, and my partner ought to be here."

"If he was a partner true, most sweetest ob de sweet," said Ching-Ching, with his softest and most insinuating smile, "he would be here. No man wif de heart ob a man keep from your side one moment. I be berry glad to sit beside you forever."

The girl said something to one of her companions, who shrugged her shoulders, and replied "Petervick had a rough temper when he is put out."

"Me no afraid ob Peterscratch," said Ching-Ching, imperfectly catching the name.

"He is twice your size," said the girl.

"But he not made ob my stuff," returned Ching-Ching. "Show me dis Peterscrakle, and let me kill him first, and den come and dance wif you."

"There is no need for anything so serious," said the girl, rising and laughing. "Petervich ought to have kept his word. I am ready."

"And perhaps dat next to you, de most fairest creeter in de world, will dance wif my friend?" said Ching-Ching. "He berry great man. De youngest son ob de Remper-or ob old Carolina."

A few more words passed, an introduction was effected, and they stood up to dance.

There was not much to learn, simply a little advancing and retiring, mingled with twirls, during which the partners hugged each other consunedly; and our friends got on very well indeed.

Samson kept up a fire of grins for the edification of his partner, and Ching-Ching, with soft and oily phrases, of which he was a master, won his way to the heart of the girl beside him. She thought him a very pleasant young man indeed.

While this was going on, Petervich, who was a heavy young man, with the brain and frame of a hippopotamus, had been looking about for his girl, and after making the circuit of the room thrice, it struck him that she must be dancing, and in a few moment he was edified by the sight of her and Ching-Ching twirling like teetotums.

Petervich was slow in all things, as a rule, and it generally took him a week to get out any idea at all clearly, but he arrived at a

conclusion respecting his lady love and the Chinee with the most astounding rapidity.

He saw that he was being betrayed by the girl he loved.

Nevertheless, he was in no hurry to do anything but sit upon a seat, and gasped and stared until the whirling couple came near to him, and quite unconscious of his presence, talked as they danced.

"You are very agreeable," said the girl.

"You are a lubly angel," replied Ching-Ching. "Come, fly wif me to Pekin, and lib in the remperor's pagoda."

Petervich's blood began to boil, and taking off his beaver gloves, after a long search in his pocket, he brought forth a knife. At that moment the dance concluded, and Ching-Ching most gallantly escorted his partner back to her seat.

She saw Petervich, and changed color slightly, but Ching-Ching, not knowing the outraged lover, was not in any way affected by his presence.

"After dat ethereal exercise," said Ching-Ching, "what will you moisten dem two rose-leafs ob lips ob yourn wif?"

Petervich changed the knife from the right hand to the left, and made preparations for opening the blade.

"I don't think I want anything," replied the girl. Her sex will never take anything the first time, and that is why the bans are thrice published.

Ching-Ching knew this, and returned to the assault.

"I see," he said, glancing at a bar close by, "dat dey hab gin, rum—rum de stuff. No? Den it not de stuff. Cherry brandy—jis a lilly drop ob cherry brandy."

"Well, it must be a very little drop," said the girl, hesitating.

This was an answer, and Ching-Ching sped on his errand, running against Samson, who was bound for the same port for a cargo of the same description.

"Cherry brandy for yourn, Samson?"

"Yes, Chingy."

"Dey all take it," said Ching-Ching, with the air of a philosopher.

A number of people were at the bar waiting to be served by a crabbed-faced old woman, who seemed to be in no hurry to attend to anybody. She was evidently made of

sterner stuff than most barmaids, but she must have been made of adamant to have resisted Ching-Ching.

"Two glasses of cherry brandy, handsome moder," he said, "and smile on 'em sweet to gib 'em a flavor."

The old woman had never known the blessings of a married life, but she liked the idea of being considered a matron, and two glasses of cherry brandy were placed upon the counter.

A silver coin, belonging to another customer, was lying near, and she took it up in payment.

"That's my money," said the owner.

"Oh! sir," said Ching-Ching, sweetly, "how can you develop de bad principles ob wronging your neighbor like dat. But nebber mind," he added, with virtuous resignation, "I put down the money again." And tossing a coin upon the counter he walked away, leaving the other at a great disadvantage; in fact, "the handsome moder" declined to serve him, and he was ordered out of the booth.

While this was going on, Petervich had drawn near to his lady love, and in a hoarse voice, whispered:

"Anna."

"Well?" she said.

"Who's that rascal?" asked Petervich, pointing at Ching-Ching.

"I know no rascal," said Anna; "if you allude to my friend, he is an ambassador from the Court of China, on a mission to secure the hand of our good Czarina."

"Pooh! poof!" exclaimed Petervich, contemptuously.

Anna turned her back upon him.

"You need not speak to me again," she said.

Petervich uttered a low growl, and opened his knife with a click. A sudden resolve was written on his face.

It was impossible to misunderstand his look or attitude, and Ching-Ching, catching sight of him, intuitively grasped his poniard. Handing the brandy to Anna, he continued to whisper soft nothings, keeping one eye on his rival.

"You had better look out," whispered Anna. "A common fellow who has annoyed me with his professions of love is close by,

and, as he is a spiteful rogue, he may try to do you a mischief."

"I settle him," returned Ching-Ching.

He could see Petervich making preparations for a strike, and as the boor elevated the knife, he suddenly turned, kicked off the shoes he wore, and grasped the Russian's wrist with his foot with such power that Petervich dropped the knife and uttered a roar like a bull.

A crowd gathered around and Samson was upon the spot in a moment.

Ching-Ching, still holding his agonized enemy firmly, looked around and pointed to the knife on the floor.

A howl of execration rose up against the hapless Petervich, for the knife is not popular in Russia any more than it is in England, and as Ching-Ching let him go, he was seized by the arms and legs and carried to the door. Outside a fresh body took him in hand and rolled him in the snow. Cooled by this treatment, he made a precipitate retreat.

Two more dances followed, and Ching-Ching talked and looked unutterable things. He favored Anna with several authentic interesting anecdotes concerning his relatives at Pekin, and graphically depicted the splendor of his ancestral home.

"We hab a pagoda for ebery day ob de year," he said, "and my farder got so much money dat he shoot sparrows wif gold dollars and poke de fire wif a diamond-ended stick. He so liberal dat nobody ever ask him for a handful ob gold but he gib him two, and de only ting he want to make him happy is to see me wif a lubly Russian wife."

"But you are engaged to the daughter of the czar," said Anna, casting down her eyes and sighing.

"She," said Ching-Ching, who had taken copious libations of rum cold, "she berry lilly better dan a skewer—you a lubly eber-bloomin' rose. Oh! Anna, will you fly wif me?"

"When?" asked Anna, cautiously.

"Dis night," whispered Ching-Ching.

"But how?" asked Anna again; "the river is frozen, the land is impassable, and we could not get ten miles on the way without being overtaken by the soldiers of the czar."

For a moment, and for a moment only,

was Ching-Ching bothered and then his genius came to his rescue.

"Lubly Anna," he said, "dis not de first time I see you. I hab lubbed you a long time and eberyting am ready."

"But how will you go?"

"In a balloon," replied Ching-Ching, and taking advantage of two people standing in front with their backs to him, he imprinted on Anna's lips a chaste salute.

"I'm a-looking at you," said Sammy, popping out from behind a tub. "Oh! Chingy, my broder."

"All right, Sammy," was Ching-Ching's reply. "What you want?"

"I'm goin' outside—dere's a little boxing and wrestling going on."

"Dat de case?" said Ching-Ching; "den I go and hab a lilly fun wif you——"

Turning to Anna, who had not overheard this dialogue, he said:

"A 'portant message just come from de Court. I be back directly."

"You are sure you will come?" sighed Anna.

"De word ob de Ching-Ching family hab eber been dere bond," replied our friend, solemnly.

Another sigh from Anna, and a few more whispered words from Ching-Ching, and they parted.

Samson joined Ching-Ching at the door of the saloon, and arm and arm they sallied into the street.

Now, in the winter nothing is more common than the sight of men and boys boxing or wrestling. This is merely a diversion, and seldom ends in anger or quarrels, but usually a good-humored challenge is met in a friendly spirit, and is probably indulged in for the sake of warming themselves.

The adversaries stand close together and strike each other with the open hand or doubled fist, according to agreement, at the same time looking out for an opportunity to oblige the opposite party with a trip or a fall.

When the latter is accomplished the battle is supposed to be over. The victor is cheered and the vanquished laughed at.

Several couples were engaged in this amiable entertainment when our friends emerged and they were at once inspired with a desire to box and wrestle. Ching-Ching was not

long in want of an adversary, for Peterovich came forward and struck an attitude which was supposed to be defiant, but which would have done credit to any clown in a pantomime.

"Take my rumrella and fan, Sammy," said Ching-Ching, "and keep de lilly boys off while I bash him to bits."

Ching-Ching, half-seas-over, was determined, and the insulted Peterovich, burning under the pangs of a lost love, was determined too.

Both were ready and ripe to ignore the usual public rules of Russian wrestling and boxing, which makes the first fall a finale, and to turn it to a duel to the death.

"Give him one fall and drop him lightly," said one of the bystanders to Peterovich.

"I'll give him one and fall upon him," muttered Peterovich. "Now, are you ready, you Chinese wasp?"

"Me berry much ready," replied Ching-Ching, calmly, and Peterovich confidently advanced.

A few preliminary flourishes, which ended in Peterovich getting an ugly tap on the bridge of his nose, gave the spectators an idea of the sport to come, and Samson, flourishing the umbrella so as to put the heads of those around him in jeopardy, bellowed out:

"Hooror, Chingy; dat de one; gib him anoder Belvedere touch on de same spot."

No sooner said than done, and Peterovich danced with pain. Madly he rushed forward, and the next instant felt that the world somehow had got upside down.

Crash!

"Is he dead?" cried one of the spectators, rushing forward.

Peterovich had a harder skull than most men possess, and he lay upon his back, blinking like an owl, a little confused in his ideas, never very clear at the best of times, but otherwise unhurt.

He staggered to his feet, and those around him cried "Enough," but he warned them off, swinging his arms like mill-sails.

"I want to get one grip on him," he growled; "only one grip, and then I shall die happy."

He might as well have tried to catch a swallow with the lasso as to lay hands on Ching-Ching, who dodged about like a

shadow, and, coming up behind, threw him heavily again.

"Enough," once more cried the spectators.

"Stand out ob de way," said Ching-Ching, bowling two or three over like skittles; "dis no common quarrel. Now, den, ole party, am you ready again?"

It was injudicious of Ching-Ching to do violence to the populace, but in his less sober moments he was not wise, and what man is? Several murmurs of disapprobation were heard.

The sympathies of the lookers-on were naturally with their countryman, and as he stepped to his feet they gave him a cheer of encouragement.

His face was now the image of concentrated fury, and instead of rushing forward to attack, he stood still, waiting for Ching-Ching to make the advance. Ching-Ching, who had lost his wariness, darted in, and the strong arms of the giant closed around him.

"Now," grunted Peterovich, "I've got you tight."

Ching-Ching yelled, and the spectators heard his bones crack. Samson uttered a howl of dismay and knocked down a man with the umbrella; but all was not yet lost.

Ching-Ching was made of steel.

With a mighty effort he burst open the arms of Peterovich and, seizing him by the waist, turned him over and threw him.

The soft snow received him, or that fall would have ended his earthly career; but as it was he was so shaken that he lay like one dead. Ching-Ching struck an attitude of triumph, which the Russians resented with a howl of rage.

"Not a fair fight!" roared one.

"He should have left him after the first throw," bawled another, inconsistently, seeing that Peterovich had insisted upon a renewal of the combat.

"Down with the Chineel!" cried a third, and the crowd ominously closed in.

Ching-Ching was exhausted, and Samson alone would be but an imperfect match for the mob. The position of the pair was perilous.

"Down with them!" cried the mob again, and a general rush took place.

Samson struck out and laid several of the attacking party in the dust, or, rather, in the snow; but it would have fared ill with them but for an arrival of friendly help.

"To the rescue, Belvederes!" was heard above the din, and Ching-Ching, who had fallen, knew the voice and recovered instantly.

"It's Missa Tom," he cried, and he and Samson cut a lane through the surrounding people in a twinkling.

"Just in time, Missa Tom," said Ching-Ching.

"And no time to lose," said Tom. "Come to the Belvedere at once."

They sped away so rapidly that the dull and sluggish crowd had no thought of detaining or following them ere they were out of sight, and five minutes' smart run brought them back to the gallant Belvedere.

CHAPTER VII.

OUT IN THE WASTES.

The two sledges were already there, each capable of accommodating eight men. The agent of the police was in close conference with Harry as Tom and the rescued chums arrived.

"In each sledge," said the agent, "there is a tent, and in a box you will find what cooking utensils you may need. I have also placed a dozen boxes of matches there, but in case they should give out, here is the old-fashioned flint and steel."

"Thank you," said Harry.

"At night," pursued the agent, speaking rapidly, "light great fires to keep away the wolves and station your horses close to the tents; for their fodder look out for the nests of the giant ants, which are entirely built of grass. You will find them in sheltered nooks by the score, and your horses will not want."

"That is worth knowing," said Harry.

"If you are stopped and challenged, show this pass," said the agent, giving our hero a slip of parchment with a seal upon it; "and now farewell. You must not feel meanly of me for taking money of you in

the first instance, brother as I am, for I want it to purchase a commission in the navy for my son. It has been his dream and my desire."

"I can never think otherwise than well of you," said Harry, as they shook hands. "Farewell."

There were three horses to each sledge, driven abreast, all garnished with jangling bells. Harry settled to drive one and Tom the other. With our hero rode Ira Staines, Samson, Ching-Ching and four men. Tom had for his companions Bill Grunt, Cutten and five of the sailors. Every man was armed to the teeth, and a lot of ammunition was stowed away in the boxes and pockets of the sledges.

They drove rapidly through the fair, and as they glided swiftly by the dancing tent the gentle dancer came out and caught sight of Ching-Ching. He smiled, but she shook her little fist at him and stamped her little fur boot upon the snow.

"Dat jest like women," said Ching-Ching to Samson; "you neber know when you do de right ting to please dem."

"But am you doing it now, Chingy?" asked Samson, in a remonstrating tone.

"I act de manly part," said Ching-Ching; "berrer run away dan so skewer de affections ob dat lubly female, dat she neber get ober it. It berrer to leave um early, Sammy, afore dey totally lost."

"You know best, Chingy," said Samson.

"Dere was one young girl," rejoined Ching-Ching, reflectively, "for whom I neber forgive myself. She lived in Pekin, on de opposite side ob de way to my farder's pagoda, and ebery mornin' I see her doing up her back hair while I braid my pigtail."

"You do dat ebery morning?" inquired Samson, who could not remember having seen his friend's hair otherwise than as he wore it.

"At dat time I was a bit ob a swell," sighed Ching-Ching; "but ob late years I hab giben up vanities and gone in for de serus line ob life."

"Well, go on, Chingy; about de girl."

"We see each oder, dat girl and me," continued Ching-Ching. "and while we brush we look at each oder. One morning I wink at her, den she blush. The next

morning she wink; den I turn red all ober and feel as if I going to blow up. Aner dat we bof wink, but don't blush no more, and so we go on courtin' and courtin' for months and enjoy ourselves like anything."

"But didn't you neber meet outside?" asked Samson.

"De women ob Pekin," replied Ching-Ching, looking at him slyly, "neber come out ob door until dey am married."

"But s'pose dey neber marry?"

"Den dey neber come out. But to re-soom, Sammy. Dis lubly creature and me went on lubbing and courting, until one day when my farder, standing at de front door, see her wink and tink dat she wink at him. He was a bery moral man, Sammy; but he often got led away by de lub ob a joke, and he wink back again. De girl open de window and look out. My farder, still feeling de joke ob de ting, cross ober to speak to her. He look up and open him thin lilly mouf, when quash! come down a lot ob water, and de farder ob dat girl rush out and took a mean advantage ob my farder being in a fit of choler. He kick my farder once, twice, and drag him all ober de street by de pigtail. Dat night, by de fire-side, I relate all to my farder, and he solemnly swar dat if eber I marry dat girl he leave de fam'ly 'states to de Royal Society for de Promotion ob Cruelty to Animals."

"Dat a bery good society, Chingy."

"Bery good, Sammy; but not good enough for me to stand by and see it swallow all de fam'ly propery. So for de sake ob my children——"

"Your children!" cried Samson. "How many you got?"

"Oh, Sammy!" exclaimed Ching-Ching, awfully shocked: "me not married yet, but when I speak ob my children I look into de great future, when I hab de good fortune to bless some lubly flower wif de name ob Ching-Ching. So, Sammy, I gib her up, and from dat hour I brush my hair in a back room."

Ching-Ching paused, and slowly drawing forth a pocket handkerchief, which Samson recognized as the property of Cutten, carefully wiped his right eye.

"Go on," said Samson.

"A week after dat," replied Ching-Ching,

checking a sob, "dere was a hearse standin' at de door, ready to take her away as soon as de post-mortal examination was ober."

"Was she dead, Chingy?"

"Yes, Sammy; and it come so sudden dat de people tink her farder pison her, so dat de iust mortal examination was made, and what do you tink dey found, Sammy?"

"Pison," suggested Samson.

"No; try it again, ole man."

"A lot o' pins?"

"Oh, no; try once more."

"Gib it up, Chingy."

"Dey found on her breast de words, 'Lubly Ching-Ching, I die for him,'" said Ching-Ching with increased solemnity, "and den de trufe was known."

"Who put dem words dere?" asked Samson, a little puzzled.

"Dey was 'graved," said Ching-Ching, "by de emotions ob her maiden heart. Oh, Sammy! neber trifle wif de affections ob de young and de fair."

"I won't, Chingy," said Samson.

And as he thought of that hapless maiden, tears of sorrow welled into his eyes, while Ching-Ching, probably to conceal his own overpowering feelings, turned his head away and blew his nose violently.

The sledges were now outside St. Petersburg, and before them lay a great waste of ice and snow—a dark plain, dismal and wretched to the eye.

"Cheerful," muttered Tom, as he gave his horses a touch of the whip. "I think we have got into something good now."

And indeed they had.

CHAPTER VIII.

DEEP IN DANGER.

There is something awfully impressive in great wastes of land which bear the impression of being little frequented by man.

Russia is but thinly populated, and wide tracks of land without anything worthy the name of road are scattered all over the country.

Some are so large that a race of people

might exist and flourish there and the world outside be none the wiser.

It was not quite so bad as this just outside St. Petersburg, but it was very desolate.

The snow lay upon everything—the trees, the pasture lands, the scattered houses and the roads, a white sheet below, standing out in bold contrast to the murky pall above.

"I wonder how long we shall be able to keep the road?" asked Ira Staines.

"I think we may safely leave that to the instinct of the horses," replied Harry; "they will keep us straight enough if we trust to them."

"What part are we bound for?"

My chart tells me that he has made for Ticksin," said Harry.

"That is some distance from here?"

"Four hundred miles," said Harry, coolly.

"Whew!" whistled Ira.

And as an assistant to meditation he rolled a cigarette and lit it.

A little later Ching-Ching proposed to lighten the way with a song, and having obtained our hero's consent, he favored them with one of those tremendously long ditties for which he was so justly renowned.

He had barely finished it when the short day closed and night came on.

It was impossible to travel in the darkness, and they looked about them for a place of shelter.

But they had now traveled out of the reach of clustered habitations, and there was only one place in sight—a rambling, high-roofed house on the summit of a hill.

There was a light burning in one of the windows, and toward it Harry directed the horses.

As he drew nearer he perceived that it was a farm house, for all around it were stables and the low barns common in Russia; but there were no signs of horses, poultry or cattle.

"It looks desolate enough," said Tom. "Upon my word, it has quite a ghostly look. Shall I knock at the door, Harry?"

"If you please."

Giving the reins to Bill Grunt, Tom got out and hammered lustily at the door.

"Who's there?" cried a voice within.

"English, at any rate," said Tom.

Then aloud:

"Travelers in want of a night's rest."

"Come in," said the same voice.

And Tom, raising the latch, found himself in a large, rambling hall, which seemed to be the dining-room, drawing-room and kitchen of the house.

At one end a large fire was burning upon an old stone hearth, and beside it a tall man, with long, grizzly hair about his face, was seated.

"Good-evening," said Tom.

"A better evening than this to you," returned the stranger.

"Can you give us room? We are a large party—sixteen in all."

"Such accommodation as my house can give is yours."

"Well said, and thank you, friend," said Tom. "Shall we disturb your cattle if we stable our horses?"

"Not at all," replied the man, with a grim smile. "Do what you will."

"There is a lantern here, I see. May I use it?"

"Certainly."

Tom took it down and went forth again.

He gave the substance of the conversation to Harry, adding his opinion that it was a queer place, and he was more than ever convinced that it was haunted.

"But anything for a change."

"Sartainly, sor," said Ching-Ching. "A lilly ghost would be bery refreshing."

"You think so? Did you ever see a ghost?"

"Many, Missa Tom, bery many. Dere was one——"

"Not now," Ching-Ching," interposed Tom. "It is too cold to stand here listening to yarns."

Four of the men were told off to stable the horses, and the rest trooped into the kitchen, where they found their host arranging some rough forms in front of the fire for their accommodation.

Harry thanked him in a few courteous words and asked for the name of his host.

"John Tyneford," he said.

"It sounds English."

"I am English," replied the man, "or, rather, British. My father was a Scotchman, my mother was an Irishwoman, and I was born in England."

"Strange that you should come here," said Ira Staines.

"Very," was the dry response; "but I am here."

"Do you live alone?"

"Yes."

"How, then, do you manage your farm?"

"Oh, I do not manage it," replied Tyneford. "There is no farm to manage. I have the buildings only. The land is managed by another man."

"Odd," thought Ira.

And others thought so, too, but good taste forbade that they should press him further.

"Such fare as I have," continued the host, "is rough, but it is good. Smoked boar, dried tongues of reindeer, caviare and bread."

"Royal fare," cried Tom, whose appetite, like the others', had been sharpened by the keen air during the ride.

Tyneford placed the eatables on the tables—a very liberal quantity—and all assembled fell to with a will.

The host alone ate nothing, excusing himself by saying that he had already supped, and sat by the fire much in the same attitude as Tom found him.

"You must find it lonely here?" said Tom.

"So lonely," replied the man, "that sometimes I think that every other creature but myself has been swept off the face of the earth."

"Why, then—excuse me—why, then, do you stay?"

"I am here by another's will, not my own. But I do not repine. It is my duty. For fourteen years I have endured it, and I am not going to repine now."

"That is right," said Harry; "but it must be a sore trial to you."

"I am sorely tried," replied the other, "and there are times when I feel that I must rush into man's society again and unburden the story of my life. Not that there is anything in it, but I want somebody to confide in, and I often talk to the birds and beasts—nay, to the very air. It relieves me."

"Poor fellow," murmured Harry.

And he mentally resolved to know more of his host before he left the place.

The supper over, a very merry party gathered round the fire.

The host withdrawing to a shady corner, where he sat looking on with a mournful air, which was inexpressibly touching, Harry took a seat beside him.

The conversation turned upon ghosts, and some said there were such things and others said there were not.

Ira Staines supported the former and led off with a short story.

"Ghosts there are," he said; "that I'll vouch for; and if you will keep quiet for a minute I will tell you something that happened to me."

"I hope every gentleman keep quiet," said Ching-Ching, "specially Missa Grunt and ole Cutten, who am de clatterboxes ob de Belvedere."

"What do you drag me in for?" demanded Bill. "I ain't opened my mouth to-night."

"Oh, Missa Grunt," said Ching-Ching, with an air of tender brotherly reproach, "how can you say dat, when not half an hour ago I see you putting into it bits ob meat and bread enuf to choke a horse."

A laugh at Bill's expense followed this reply, and Bill, with a most awful expression of face, rolled up a big quid and thrust it into his cheek, chewing with a vigor that showed the depth of his emotion.

"But let me get on with the story," said Ira. "It's not a long one, but will give you quarrelsome fellows time enough to get cool."

"About six years ago I was a passenger on board a craft running between Barbadoes and Cuba. It was only a small trading vessel, but it took passengers if anybody wanted a lift from one place to the other. The captain was a sullen-looking chap, but not so bad when you knew him. His looks were not kind to him and made him appear much worse than he was. I liked him, and he liked me, and so we became chums. When he was not on deck we managed to spend our hours together in his cabin, and it was during one of these visits that I saw the ghost."

"When the cap'n was off duty?" said Bill Grunt.

"You must be quiet, Missa Grunt," said Ching-Ching, softly.

"Who spoke to you?" growled Bill. "I'm darned——"

"You are quite right, Grunt," said Ira. "It was on one of these occasions that I beheld what is commonly called a ghost. In the captain's cabin, and just behind the chair he usually sat in, was a long oak chest, secured to the floor to keep it steady in rough weather. I generally sat facing the captain, so that I got a view of the chest."

"Of course——" began Bill, but catching Ching-Ching's sarcastic eye, he stopped, and Ira went on:

"We were sitting and smoking," he said, "just as we are now, and talking on general subjects, when I happened to look at the chest and saw, to my terror, the form of a man stretched out upon it—a most awful figure, with just a few rags gathered about its emaciated form, and a face which looked like that of a man who had been dead many days and tossing about the sea. I dare say many of you know what I mean."

Several of the listeners shuddered. They knew too well what sort of a thing it was to look upon.

Ira continued:

"What's the matter with you?" asked the captain.

"Look there!" I cried.

"He turned and sprang up from his seat with a most fearful yell, and with that cry the figure vanished."

"It's my brother Jack!" he said.

"I thought we both must have been the victims of fancy, but on comparing notes I found that the figure had appeared to each alike. We agreed as to every particular of look, dress and attitude."

"Did you notice——" began Ching-Ching, when Bill Grunt interrupted him.

"Who's speaking now?" he asked.

"Not me," replied Ching-Ching. "I know myself better than to interrupt Missa Staines. I ax only lilly question and hab done wif it."

This most unreasonable and unreasoning answer would have led to more disputation but for Ira's continuing his story:

"At last we agreed that we must both have been deceived, the mind of one acting on the

other, perhaps, but an hour later the captain came up to me and said he had seen it again.

"Where?" I asked.

"There," he said, pointing to the poop. I looked at the place alluded to, and there was the figure again. You may believe me or not, but it is true. We both saw it and stood looking at it for a full minute or more, and then it slowly faded and vanished.

"Something's happened to Jack," said the captain.

"What is he?" I asked.

"He trades much as I do. We never care to go far apart. We are twin brothers."

"I mused over this answer all that night, for sleep I could not, and at dawn I went upon the deck, where I found the captain, who had been unable to sleep either. We stood together, looking out upon the sea, tinged with the gray of the early morning, neither speaking, until suddenly a great cry—the very counterpart of that he uttered in the cabin the day before—escaped the captain's lips. He stood with one arm extended, and, following its direction, I, too, had cause to cry out, for there, not fifty yards across from the ship, was the floating corpse of a man, with the rotted rags and the ghastly face we knew too well."

Staines paused and a dead silence reigned until he spoke again.

"It was his brother Jack, whose ship had been wrecked a fortnight before, and he had floated about for fourteen days in the sea. You may not easily imagine the awful spectacle he presented, but you reckon that it was something too horrible for a man to see more than once in a lifetime."

"Dat a bery good story," said Ching-Ching, "but not so bad as one I know ob."

"Let us hear the story," said Ira.

"It ain't pleasant to me to sit and hear a pack o' lies," said Bill Grunt, in a loud tone of voice, and looking about him.

"It spiles all real e'yement," said Cutten, supporting him.

But nobody else came to their aid, and as the fire was the great comfort of the room, Bill and Cutten kept their seats.

Ching-Ching gave Sammy a playful dig in the ribs with his fan, and then composed

himself to relate the most veracious ghost story on record.

CHAPTER IX.

TWO STORIES, AND SOMETHING REAL.

"Dis story ob mine," began Ching-Ching, "am one ob de sacred records ob de noble family ob which I am de noblest member, an' afore I go on I wish to tell two genlymen dat bear de name ob Grunt and Cutten dat it a bery dangerous trick to stick up dere noses so high, for dey may get 'em fixed and neber pull 'em down again."

The noses in question dropped full five inches, but their eyes flashed scornfully as the company gazed upon them.

Ching-Ching continued:

"Our family mansion," he said, "was de largest for nine hundred miles round, and de gardens were ranged on de true Chinese principle, with eberything where you want it, and nothing where you didn't want it. My farder—a bery cleber man—went to a great expense to fill up de lake and make a hill, and where de hill was he cut out a big hole and make a lake, and dis lake am de subject ob my story.

"Dis lake," said Ching-Ching, with a soft smile and tear in his eye, brought there by the memories of the past, "was de pride ob my farder's heart and de joy ob my childhood. Down dere we went ebery morning, and my farder, wif him pocket-knife, cut me out a lilly boat, and cut him fingers, too. Ah! dem was bery happy times, when we swim dat boat on a bit ob string, and de way my farder used to tumble into de water after dinner made me bery proud ob him. He a bery cleber man."

"He was drunk, I suppose," said Bill Grunt, gruffly.

"Like his son is sometimes," added Cutten.

"I not able to say," said Ching-Ching, sweetly, "for I hab no 'qaintance wif genlymen ob dat persuasion; but it a great pity dat nobody so experienced as bof of you was dere to tell wedder he was or not. To resoom; One day my farder say to me,

'Chingy, apple ob my eye, your farder going to make a big boat.' 'For me?' say I. 'No,' say he, 'for myself, my dear Chingy, joy ob my life.'"

"I'm darned if you're the joy of mine," growled Bill.

"We went to work de next day," continued Ching-Ching, ignoring the interruption, "and my farder buy a packet ob tin-tacks and a bunch ob screws. Den he pull up de boards ob de back attic and carry dem down to de lake to make de boat. We make dat boat, and bery lubly it were, and dere only one mistake, which we find out afterwards. It got no keel! In de innocence ob our hearts we not tink dat de boat want it. My farder put him afloat and got in. 'Come along, Chingy, my lilly sweet,' he ses. 'No, t'ank you, farder,' I say, for I see dat boat wobble about frightful; 'no, t'ank you, farder,' I say. 'I stop here and see you row. I like dat berrer.' My farder smile on me and pull out. He got to de middle ob de lake, when de boat turn ober, and I see him feet sticking in de air. I stop 'bout half an hour to see if he come right again, but no—him feet still stick up. I run home for help."

"Time you did," said Bill.

"De help," continued Ching-Ching, sobbing slightly, "was wain; my farder quite dead, and so fast stuck in de mud dat we left him dere and went home to dinner. De rain come on and de lake rise higher above my farder's feet. My moder was much affleckted, and sobbing on my shoulder she say, 'Oh, Chingy, my awfulspring, his body gone, but we shall see him ghost.'"

Ching-Ching stopped short and gazed meditatively into the fire.

This was nothing but a trap, which Bill Grunt promptly fell into.

"Didn't nobody see that ghost?" he asked.

"My farder," he said, "not a common man, and he not make a common ghost. De common ghost come when people am about, but my farder come out when nobody looking."

"Then nobody seen him?" persisted Bill.

"Not a libing man unto dis day," replied Ching-Ching, solemnly, "and dat what make him ghost so bery uncommon."

Bill opened his mouth to say something more, when a roar of laughter told him he

had been sold. Muttering something which sounded very unamiable, he retired into the shade and declined to enter into the conversation again.

During the relation of this interesting story Harry had been in conversation with Tyneford, their host, the subject being the life he was leading.

Harry offered to take him with him and receive him on board the *Belvedere*.

"Believe me," said Tyneford, with tears in his eyes, "I would gladly go, but I am bound and tied here."

"By what?" inquired Harry.

"Ask me not," was the man's reply, "and blame me not if I refuse to answer. I—I have written my story, and I will confide it to you if you will promise not to read it until you are a hundred miles away."

"I promise," said Harry, "and I would gladly be——"

"You could not render me a service now," said Tyneford, hurriedly. "No, let me be. I must remain here."

Harry questioned him no more, but he felt sorry for his host, who seemed to suffer keenly.

Tyneford went over to a bureau drawer in the corner, from which he took a manuscript and placed it in our hero's hand.

"It may interest you," he said, "for it is a strange story."

As the hour was so late, Harry desired his men to make some arrangements for rest.

Their host brought out a number of rugs and furs, which were arranged in front of the fire, and fresh logs having been put on, all lay down to rest.

The fatigues of the day soon told upon all but Harry, and he could not sleep.

Even Tyneford, by his slow, regular breathing, betrayed the fact that Nature had given to him her sweet oblivious balm, but Harry only closed his eyes and sought repose in vain.

His mind wandered here and there—to Juanita, to the wild waste he passed that day, to the kingdom of King Matta and the burning wood; but it always came back to their strange host, who was lying with the flames of the fire playing fitfully o'er his face.

He was a strange, weird-looking man, but

in times gone by he must have been handsome.

He was not what the world calls a gentleman—that is, he had not the refined advantages which wealth and position give, but he was above the common run and reminded Harry of the sturdy yeomen of old England.

What was he and what had he been? And what possible tie could keep him here?

Had he committed a great crime, or was he suffering for the crime of another?

These questions ran through Harry's brain until they got confused, and then—

A cry!

Such a cry as he had seldom heard!

It was like the shriek of a despairing soul, and it took the form of words—

"Lost! Ruined! Wrecked!"

Harry was awake again in a moment, and he sat up.

None of the others stirred, save Tyneford, who turned over, sighed, and slept again.

"Strange!" thought our hero; "I could not have been dreaming."

He lay still for a long time, but no sounds save those made by the men around him broke the stillness, and slowly his thoughts got confused again; sleep was upon his eyelids when—

The cry again—

"Lost! Ruined! Wrecked!"

He sprang up, and at the same moment Tyneford woke up, too.

"What is the matter?"

"Some cry—above, I think," said Harry.

"Lie down again," replied his weird host, with composure; "it is not of this world."

"I am not superstitious," said Harry; "it was a human voice."

"It was," replied Tyneford, "but it is not a mortal one. Lie down again."

"You have some prisoner here," said Harry. "I will search the house."

Tyneford got up softly, took the lantern off the table, lighted it, handed it to him.

"Search," he said, "but blame me not if ill befall you."

"I have no fear," said Harry. "Which is the door that leads to the room above?"

"That in the corner," replied Tyneford. "The whole of the upper floor is one room. You have an easy task before you."

Our hero was not in love with the task he

had set himself, but it was not in his nature to shrink, and, taking the lantern, he opened the door pointed out and ascended the musty stairs.

As Tyneford had told him, the floor above stretched from one end of the house to the other and the bare rafters above shut out all thoughts of there being a place of concealment beyond the ceiling. There was a little furniture about, but not much—a table, a chair, a trucklebed and a few skins—but no indication of either a light or a fire.

"It was no natural sound," thought Harry, and, shuddering, he descended again. Tyneford received him with a smile.

"Well?" he said.

"All is empty above," replied Harry.

"I told you so, and be thankful that no ill has befallen you. You look wonder-struck. That manuscript will explain all."

"I shall look forward to the time when I am at liberty to read it," said Harry, as he lay down to rest again.

"Having heard that cry, have you no fear?" asked Tyneford.

"No," replied Harry; "God is above all. If the cry comes from good it will not harm me; if from bad, it cannot. Good-night, my friend."

"Good-night," said Tyneford.

In a few minutes Harry, in spite of the strange and wonderful adventure which had befallen him, was sound asleep.

CHAPTER X.

A LITTLE HUNTING PARTY.

A winter's day in the region of the capital of Russia is very short indeed, as it has only five hours' daylight. The day begins at ten o'clock and ends at three, but long before the first-named hour everybody at the lone house was up and stirring.

Tyneford put upon the board another supply of provisions, and when Tom asked him if they were not preying upon his store, he replied that the wood around was full of game and that he had plenty of powder and shot.

"So fall to," he added, "and think no more about it."

Something was afterward said about payment, but he promptly declined to receive anything, declaring that money was of no use to him.

"But it will buy you more powder and shot," suggested Ira Staines.

"I have more money by me than I should require if I lived twice over," was the reply.

"But the rent?"

"There is none. This house is bought and paid for."

"It is your own?" said Harry.

Tyneford did not answer this directly; he merely repeated his former observation, "It is bought and paid for."

The horses were brought out, and having been harnessed to the sledges, a leave-taking took place. Harry once more asked his host if he would go with him.

"I cannot," he said. "Thank you, and farewell."

"Good-by."

Swiftly, to the music of jangling bells, the sledges glided away, until they reached a bend in the road. Then Harry pulled up and looked back. Tyneford was standing by the farm door, and he waved his hand as a second farewell.

"Poor fellow!" said Harry. "An awful lot."

"What keeps him there?" asked Ira Staines.

"I tink I know," put in Ching-Ching.

"What do you think it is?" asked Harry.

"I tink, Missa Harry," said Ching-Ching, "dat he hab had a commutial tie, and de happerness ob mattlemoney was too much for him."

"That is, he has run away from his wife?"

"I tink so, Missa Harry."

"We shall know all about it in one day," said Harry, as he touched the horses with the whip.

As they drove on Samson indulged in a little reflection. He was a little dull in some matters and he could not understand a man being burdened with too much happiness.

"Chingy," he said, "how dat come about?"

"What, Sammy?"

"A man running away because he is too happy?"

"Dat's bery common event," replied Ching-Ching, readily. "Three ob my family all did it—a cousin, an uncle and an aunt. De cousin marry a woman who was quite a conjurer wif de rolling-pin, and she was allus prancing about de house, so dat my cousin bery often get in de way, and he seldom wifout a black eye and a bump. My uncle was united to a widder, who got a handsome libing by performing as de strong woman ob Pekin, and she used to practice on my uncle, and bowl him all about de house. And my aunt, she gave her heart to a man wif a wooden leg, which he used to tickle her wif when he bery drunk, and he tickle her so hard dat she run away. Ah, Sammy, dere are seberal varieties ob corruberal bliss, and some ob dem enuf to make a man's pigtail stand on end."

"No doubt you are right, Chingy," said Sammy, whose faith in the truth and sincerity of his friend was unlimited.

The road now diverged from the plain and entered upon a deep, dense wood of somber pines. The heavy foliage was covered with snow above, but the lower branches were bare, and about these innumerable squirrels were disporting themselves and making the best of a rather dismal side of life. The pretty creatures seemed to be not at all shy—a sure sign that destroying man seldom came that way.

There was no mistaking the track, however, which was distinctly marked out by the trees on either side, apparently by design, which led to the inference that the forest had been planted by human agency. Samson, who knew something about woods, was inclined to this opinion, and his keen eyes detected certain places in the road where long, long before, in forgotten ages, perhaps, attempts had been made to form a firm, hard road, something like the highways of our macadam.

The moss had overgrown these efforts, but there they were, another convincing proof of the existence of races long before the advent of those who now people the earth.

Of course the trees they there looked upon were comparatively young and were nothing but the offspring of trees originally planted

there; but it is a well-known fact that when a uniformity of design is once carried out, it takes ages to obliterate it; the seeds and offshoots of the dead plants seem to make an effort to reproduce the design, and although they but imperfectly succeed, sufficient is carried out to enlighten experienced eyes.

Tom and Harry were exchanging comments upon this apparent fact, the road being wide enough to permit them to drive side by side, when a roar was heard in the depths of the wood.

"What's that?" asked Tom.

"Bear, Missa Tom," replied Ching-Ching.

"He won't interfere with us," said Tom, indifferently.

"Bear bery good eating," said Ching-Ching.

"We have no time to stop," interposed Harry.

"Den de bear shall go along wif us," said Ching-Ching, "until we stop at night; den we kill him."

"I tell you," said Harry, "that I have no time to lose."

"And I tell you, Missa Harry," said Ching-Ching, "dat we no need to stop. Me and Sammy sit on de back ob Missa Tom's sledge; you drive on, and me bring dat bear wif me."

Curious to know what new dodge the Chinees would favor them with, Harry consented to this arrangement. He drove on, and Tom fell behind. Ching-Ching and Samson, without stopping the sledge, leaped off and exchanged places with two of the men. This arrangement unfortunately brought them into close companionship with Bill Grunt and old Cutten.

"Now we hab some fun," said Ching-Ching, amiably addressing himself to Bill Grunt.

The old boatswain turned his quid and sniffed scornfully; he wanted no fun with low, lying Chinees people.

"If all de genlymen keep quiet," continued Ching-Ching, "me bring de bear."

He and Sammy sat in the second seat, Bill Grunt and old Cutten quite in the rear, with their back to anything behind. In the position he occupied Ching-Ching rode with his back to the horses and could see anything in the rear.

"De next ting," he said, "dat am 'pernitive is dat all de genlymen keep still. If dey do nat, I am be answerable for de scounse quonches."

"Quiet, there," cried Harry, to humor him; and a stillness fell upon the party.

Ching-Ching stood up, put his hands to his mouth and gave forth a tremendous roar—a perfect imitation of the noise made by the bear.

A few seconds elapsed, and then it was answered from the wood.

"All right," said Ching-Ching, softly; "he coming."

And then he bellowed again.

"This is werry nice!" muttered Bill Grunt.

"You must be quiet," urged Ching-Ching.

Again the answer came back. Ching-Ching stooped down and listened.

"Now he come a lilly faster," he said, "wil de amerable object of habing a lilly fight wil a broder bear."

"I hope he won't plich into none of us," said old Cutten.

"If you say a word or move an inch," returned Ching-Ching, "dat de bery ting he do."

"I wish I was out of this," muttered Cutten—and a cold wave of perspiration sprang out upon his forehead.

The crashing of rotten branches under the feet of the advancing bear could now plainly be heard, and Bill Grunt and Cutten got a little closer. It was not that either of them were generally the victims of fear, but the circumstances were rather peculiar, and a little tremor was quite excusable.

"Hadn't we better change seats?" asked Bill Grunt, addressing Ching-Ching.

"No, de bear sure to come up behind, and I keep my eye on him," replied our worthy friend, amiably.

"Here he comes," cried Sammy, and a big brown bear came lumbering out of the wood.

He caught sight of the sledges, and after looking at them for a moment wonderingly, was about to move on, when Ching-Ching favored him with another bellow.

Here, then, was his enemy, in that sledge, and Bruin gave a sudden shake of the head which meant all sorts of squeezes and hugs for his enemy when he got hold of him.

"Now, sit quite still," murmured Ching-

Ching, "and I bring him along lubly. Don't look round, Massa Grunt, as dat bery fatal."

There never was such a game as this, gasped Bill.

"I'd give a year's pay to be out of it," murmured Cutten.

"Ah, my ole friend," said Ching-Ching, addressing the bear, "we all so bery glad to see you. How bery well you look—such a bery handsome, beary genlyman!"

Bruin uttered a low growl, and putting on a spurt, came within a few feet of the sledge, then, falling into a swinging trot, he came lumbering steadily on.

"Blow me if I can't feel his breath!" muttered Grunt. "I say, Master Ching-Ching, do send the brute back. Ax anything of me and I'll do it."

"No send him back now," replied Ching-Ching, sadly; "now dat he smell you he foller you foreber."

"I'm blowed if he will!" muttered Bill, feeling for a pistol; "I'll put a bullet into him."

"Missa Grunt," said Ching-Ching, earnestly, "no do dat; de bear not mind bullet; his coat laugh at dem; he open him mouf and swallow dem."

"But I can't be bothered like this all day," said Bill.

"Nor me," said Cutten. "I feel as if I was froze."

"Bery sorry, genlymen," returned Ching-Ching, calmly, "but it must be done. Sammy, who know all about bears, know dat."

Samson knew nothing whatever about bears, but he had sufficient regard for his friend to support him at this moment, and he shook his head mournfully, as if to say that Bill Grunt had got the bear and he must keep him.

Harry, Tom, Ira, and the men enjoyed the whole thing tremendously, and the officers kept their eyes in any direction but that of Bill Grunt and Cutten, so as to escape any solicitation for interference.

The heavy feet of the bear struck the ground with most venomous thuds, and sometimes he came so near that the two martyrs at the back of the sledge could really feel his hot breath, and then they shrunk up almost to nothing, and exchanged glances of dismay.

Samson's face shone again with grins; Ching-Ching remained calm, serene, and imperturbable.

"Give me a dozen ordinary men, or forty Chineesers," said Bill, in his agony getting a little fogged in his expressions, "and I'll face 'em; but I ain't used to nothing of this sort."

"You berrer keep quiet," returned Ching-Ching; "de bear am licking him chops, as if he bent upon going in for sumfin' to eat."

"I'll bolt clean out of this directly," said Bill, who for the life of him could not hold his tongue.

"De bear follow you wheresumeber you go," said Ching-Ching, and Bruin gave a low grunt as if to confirm the assertion.

"I'll take it out of you for this directly," said Bill, after another quarter of an hour's agony.

"Perhaps you not libe to do it," replied Ching-Ching.

"I'll see about that," groaned the boat-swain, producing a pistol.

"Grunt," cried out Harry, "don't be foolish; put up that weapon."

"I'm nigh drove out of my wits, sir," replied Bill Grunt, "and poor old Cutten's gone to the color of putty."

"I'm nigh to fainting," groaned Cutten.

"I'm berry sorry, Massa Harry," said that rascal Ching-Ching, with a most hypocritical leer, "but me tink dat Massa Grunt and ole Cutten berry brave men, so me bring up de bear to gib 'em pleasure; but now de bear am here, dere no sending him away. Oh, I so berry sorry."

"That's another lie," said Bill Grunt.

"Oh! no," replied Ching-Ching; "I berry sorry; Sammy know it, and he sorry too."

Samson nearly choked, and winked his rolling eyes, but he uttered not a word. Bill Grunt leaned back sulkily, and muttered:

"All I've got to say is, that if the cap'en wallyed my life, he'd put a stop to this game. Get away, you brute."

The brute of a bear had come a little closer, and sniffed suspiciously at the back of Bill's neck; then it went up to old Cutten, who in his fright tilted up his wooden leg, and nearly poked out Ching-Ching's eye.

"What did you say about the captain's carrying?" asked Tom.

"Nothing, sir," replied Bill Grunt; "at least nothing I meant."

"That's right, Grunt; but you ought to know our captain well enough by this time to be certain that he is not likely to waste valuable lives. I thought you had more regard for him."

"I'd do anything for him," said Bill, in the throes of repentance, "but it's too much to have these pracktercal jokes played on me by a yaller Chinee."

"Who play de jokes?" asked Ching-Ching.

"Ain't this a joke?" demanded Bill.

"Berry glad you look upon it as a joke," said Ching-Ching, complacently, "for me was afraid dat you take it berry serious."

"Oh, get out!" growled Bill, as a general chuckle followed this reply; "and get away, you brute."

"He's a-sniffing now," said Cutten. "Mister Ching-Ching, did I ever do you any harm?"

"Did you eber do me any good?" asked Ching-Ching, seriously. "Ah, ole Cutten. Dis a sort ob punishment on you for all' de pracktercal jokes you hab played on me."

This reply, inconsistent on the face of it, so exasperated both the victims, that they turned purple, and looked as if they were going to explode. Ching-Ching sat down like a man who had done his duty in delivering an opinion on the depravity of others, hoping at the same time that his words might have a beneficial effect.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SPECTRE BELLS.

As the day was short, Harry did not purpose to halt before nightfall. In that keen, bracing air neither the men nor the horses were likely to feel the fatigue of a five hours' journey any more than by the acquisition of a keen appetite, and nothing more than a little grog was served out about the hour of noon.

Tyneford, his host, told him as he started that morning, that he would find a village

close upon the hour of darkness, where he could halt for the night.

"You will find the peasantry rough and uncouth," he said, "and they may probably try some tricks upon you, but your party is strong enough to put them down. The inn is roomy and the stabling fair, but do not leave your horses without a watch."

These few words were not necessary, as we shall presently see. Meantime, let us briefly describe the few other events connected with the day's journey.

The sledges kept steadily on, and Bruin as steadily followed in the rear, doggedly bent upon pitching into his enemy as soon as he got a chance. He had not seen that enemy, but he had heard the grunt, and he knew he must be there. The men were quite a second consideration, and so he kept doggedly on.

Ching-Ching encouraged him with playful addresses, and an occasional growl, which never failed to bring the brute close up to the sledge, and put the boatswain and old Cutten into a fearful fume. But Bruin never offered to touch them, and in the course of an hour or so they got used to him.

Once old Cutten ventured to look behind, but the sight of the bear's huge head and lolling tongue so discomfited him that he never ventured upon it again, but sat as forward as he could on the extreme edge of his seat, and devoutly prayed for the day to come to an end.

So the time passed until ten o'clock, and the wood began to grow thinner, and Samson said it would soon come to an end. The road turned about, too, more than it had hitherto done, and on some of the trunks of the trees there were signs of the woodman's ax, where the branches had been recently lopped off.

Harry was speaking of this when the sound of bells ahead fell upon his ear. It was unexpected, for he had no reason to hope that he would overtake Captain Brock-en under three or four days. The pirate had got a very great start of him.

"Do you hear anything, Tom?" he cried.

"Bells," replied Tom.

All the men heard bells, but as they might be the echo of their own, Harry pulled up for a moment. Bruin halted, too, and

rubbed his cold nose against the back of old Cutten's head. The old man looked like one at his last gasp.

Yes, there were bells in front.

Sweet, plaintive, mellow bells, more musical than those upon their own horses.

"Forward!" cried Harry, with a hope in his breast to which he hardly dared give utterance.

The horses dashed forward. Bruin broke into a trot again, and the cavalcade reached a bend in the track.

In front of them was a long, straight piece of the road.

But nothing in sight.

"Halt!" cried Harry, as he reined up his horses.

Again the bells.

Sweet, plaintive, musical bells, which seemed to bring sunshine upon the gloomy wood and stir up the memory of the time when Harry was a boy. The vision of the village—quaint, picturesque and quiet—flashed before him.

"Strange," he said; "it is not an echo of our own."

"No," said Ira; "and yet there is no stranger here."

"But he may be on ahead."

"He must carry large bells, to be heard so far," said Ira.

"What do you think of this, Tom?" asked Harry.

"Odd," said Tom; "but the whole place is odd to me. I seem to be in dreamland. The bells have ceased."

The sound was no longer heard, and Harry urged his horses on. The moment they moved the bells were heard again. A strange awe and dread fell upon the travelers; even Ching-Ching was subdued.

Now louder—now softer—now dying far away—now seemingly but a few paces in front, the bells kept jangling; but Harry paused no more, convinced that the sounds had naught to do with anything mortal near them. Another bend in the road was reached, and a more open part of the wood was seen.

The bells were heard still, but the sound shifted.

They jangled behind them.

"A melancholy, haunted land, this," said Tom, shuddering, "and the sooner we are

out of it, and back again to something like light and life, the better I shall like it."

No man answered, and two good miles of ground were covered before lips were opened. Then an awful sound of something being smashed to pieces was heard, and the bells ceased jangling.

"That's the end of it," said Ira Staines, "and one might almost guess the story."

"What do you make of it?" asked Harry.

"A traveler, a sledge, an ambush in the road, and a murder," replied Ira.

"So far so good," rejoined Harry, "but such things are not uncommon. Why should the spirit of one murdered man haunt the earth while others rest?"

"How can I tell?" replied Ira. "Why is it that one man dies, and is forgotten, while the memory of another is imperishable? Why is one man brave and another cowardly, one wise and one foolish, this man handsome, and that man plain, or how is it we exist at all? I cannot say, nor can you or any living man. All is a mystery; we are here, surrounded by endless wonders, and that is all we know."

"True, Ira," said Harry; "you are a bit of a philosopher."

"No," replied Ira, "for philosophers are men of theory; they poke and pry about, and settle the affairs of creation. I accept things as they are, feeling assured that the more we poke about and pry the less we know."

By and by the wood ended on the summit of a hill, which gradually sloped down to a village built upon the borders of a stream, now a frozen mass of ice.

The houses were roughly built and coarsely thatched, but anything which gave promise of shelter was a welcome sight, especially as the clouds were getting dense indeed, and a few flakes of snow were falling.

All this time the bear had followed patiently and persistently, but catching sight of the houses, he pulled up and reflected. Ching-Ching had no desire to lose so much good meat, and begged of Harry to stop.

"Only one moment, Massa Harry," he pleaded; "me kill him in no time."

"Very good," said Harry; "but make haste."

The sledges were pulled up, and Ching-Ching bent his head down and gave a final

growl. The bear put his paws upon the back of the sledge, and thrust his head between Cutten and Bill Grunt, both of whom rolled over in direful fear.

"Keep still," said Ching-Ching.

The bear fixed his eyes upon the bottom of the sledge, and this was the opportunity Ching-Ching wanted. Drawing out a pistol, he coolly advanced, and, placing it against the brute's ear, fired. Bruin rolled over, dead.

"Dat all ober," said Ching-Ching, calmly; "put de body on de sledge."

"I can't see why this wasn't done afore," said Bill Grunt, "instead o' keeping me and Cutten in a state of shivers the whole blessed day."

"Dat one ob your weaknesses," replied Ching-Ching; "you neber see anyting."

The dead bear was placed upon the sledge and the party moved on to the village. At the entrance they came upon a long, rambling house, which they rightly judged to be the inn.

"House, there! house!" cried Harry.

"Who calls?" asked a heavy-looking, sullen man, as he came to the door.

"Travelers in want of rest and shelter," was the reply.

"There's enough of you, anyhow," said the man, in a grumbling tone. "I don't think I can take you all in."

"I can pay," said Harry.

"In kind, I suppose," said the man, pointing contemptuously to the dead bear.

"No, in money," said Harry.

"In gold—bright, shining, clinking gold?" eagerly inquired the man.

"Aye," said Harry; "and all we ask is a little shelter and wine and bread, and a few steaks of the bear decently cooked."

"Come in," cried the host; "you are welcome."

"Where can we put our horses?"

"At the back."

"Tom, will you see to it?" said Harry, and, lowering his voice, he added: "See if there are locks to the doors."

The warning of Tyneford was not forgotten by him.

The host held out his hand, and Harry thought he meant it to be shaken; but a

look at his face showed that he was looking for payment in advance.

"How much?" said Harry.

"Give me as much gold as you can," he replied.

Harry carelessly took a few sovereigns from his pocket and laid them within his palm.

The eyes of the man glistened.

"You are English," he said, "and therefore generous. You have paid me well, and you shall have good food and soft beds for your money."

But although he expressed himself so well satisfied, he nevertheless cast very hungry eyes at our hero's pockets.

Harry buttoned them up.

"I have paid you well," he said, "and you will get no more, unless I should stay over the night."

"You might spend a month here and be happy," said the host.

Harry shrugged his shoulders and entered the inn.

"Show me a room," he said.

"One for your excellency?" returned the host, "and the kitchen for the men?"

"I will go to the kitchen," rejoined Harry. "I like the company of my crew. Who have you in the house?"

"My wife, my daughter and my son."

"No strangers?"

"I have seen no strangers since the frost began."

Harry looked at him and saw that he was lying.

"He has been paid to keep silence," our hero thought. "Enough. I am on the right track."

Harry was shown into the kitchen—a rude place, with a number of trestles and seats about, and a huge table in the centre.

On the hearth a very jolly looking wood fire was burning.

"Dis sumfin like," said Ching-Ching, calmly taking up the best seat in front. "I feel now jest as de remperor did on de day dat him wife run away."

"How dat, Chingy?" asked Samson.

"Bery comforable," replied Ching-Ching.

"I think you might have more manners han you've got," said Bill Grunt. "That's

the only cheer in the place, and the cap'en's a right to it."

"Ob course," replied Ching-Ching. "I know de cheek ob you and ole Cutten, so I keeps it for him."

Harry smiled and sat down.

Bill Grunt swore and went into a corner, and the men made themselves as comfortable as they could.

In a few minutes the host came in and put a huge gridiron over the fire.

He was accompanied by a tall, raw-boned woman, with wild eyes, who bore a quantity of steaks, fresh cut from the bear, upon a dish.

"Now, Madge," said the man, "I'll do the cooking, while you cover the table. Bring out the best cloth to do honor to his excellency."

"Aye, you've got a jewel," growled the woman.

"I've got a king beneath my roof," said the man, tossing on the steaks and neatly turning them over and over with two sticks. "He shall have our best wine—the wine with the yellow seal—a wine kept for nobles."

"He's a soapy one," said Cutten.

"He ought to be druv in a shay with Ching-Ching," replied Bill.

Before supper, Tom and the men who had accompanied him came in.

They made room for him next to Harry.

"Well, Tom?" he asked.

"The stabling is good, and there is plenty of fodder and straw," returned Tom. "They are well cared for. The one door of the place has a strong lock, and here is the key."

Supper was soon ready, and a huge dish of steaks stood at one end.

At the other were placed a dozen bottles of wine, bread here and there.

"Begin, my lord," said the host; "and while you eat, I will cook more. We have not cut up one of the hams yet."

The steaks looked hard and dry, but that was only one of the effects of cooking.

As soon as they were cut a rich red gravy ran about the plates, and made the mouths of the men water.

"I call this stunning," said Bill Grunt, helping himself to salt with his knife. "I feel like a lion."

"But you look more like de genlyman dat get into de lion's skin," said Ching-Ching, simply.

Bill swallowed the insult and a large piece of steak at the same time, and choked.

Cutten patted him on the back and brought him round.

"By the way," said Harry, carelessly, "as we came along we heard the sound of bells, but we saw no sledge."

"That was in the bandits' pass," replied the Russian.

"So you know them?"

"We all know them," said the host. "In summer or winter, by day or night, hail, rain, snow or blow, the sound is there when a man passes through."

"A pleasant spot, truly," said Ira.

"It comes against the grain at first," replied the host, coolly, "but we get used to it. A traveler was murdered there. He was a merchant with a case of jewelry, and some of the brave lads—some of the villains who live about here, or rather lived here then—"

"Your story has many corrections," interposed Harry.

"I am but a poor hand at story-telling," replied the host, "for I see but few people, and those of the commonest kind. Nobles like your excellency seldom cross my threshold."

"Have done with your compliments and proceed with your story," said Harry, with a smile of contempt.

"This traveler, then," said the host, "had jewels of which some men knew, and they lay in wait for him, knowing that the bells upon his horses would give them timely notice of his coming."

"On he came, and they sprang forward and seized him."

"He knew his fate, and cried out for mercy."

"I have a wife and children I love," he cried. "Spare me for their sakes."

"They answered him with:

"The dead alone keep a secret."

"And they struck him with their knives."

"The cowards!" said Harry.

"Aye, the cowards, your excellency," replied the host, coolly. "They were afraid of being punished, and so they cut him down."

"As he lay weltering in his blood, with life ebbing fast away, he saw them plundering his sledge, and when that was done he, to their surprise, rose up and stood upon his feet."

"Villains!" he cried, "you who have had no mercy upon me or mine, and you shall have none in return. Henceforth be this spot accursed, and whosoever passes this spot shall hear the music of my bells ringing out a curse upon you and yours forever."

"He staggered forward and fell dead at their feet."

"The plunderers were awe-stricken, and turned and fled."

"The next morning some of the hardest went down to the spot and found the man and horses and the sledge gone; but from that hour the bells have been jingling there, and they will go on forever."

There was a rugged fervor in the man as he told the story, which impressed his listeners, and Ira Staines asked him how long ago it was.

"Twenty years," replied the man.

"And the bells have gone on all the time?"

"Aye, so I am told," he said; "but I never hear them. I never leave my house. More steaks, gentlemen?"

Ira Staines had one more question to ask.

"Did you know any of the men concerned in this?"

"All," he replied, coolly. "But think not that I was in it. I was away at market at the time, and had naught to do with it."

"You have something to do with it," thought Ira, "and I will know what it is."

[THE END.]

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